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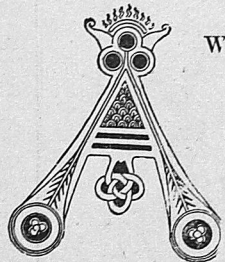
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# THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN DECORATION.

BY THKO. C. JOHANSMEYER.\*



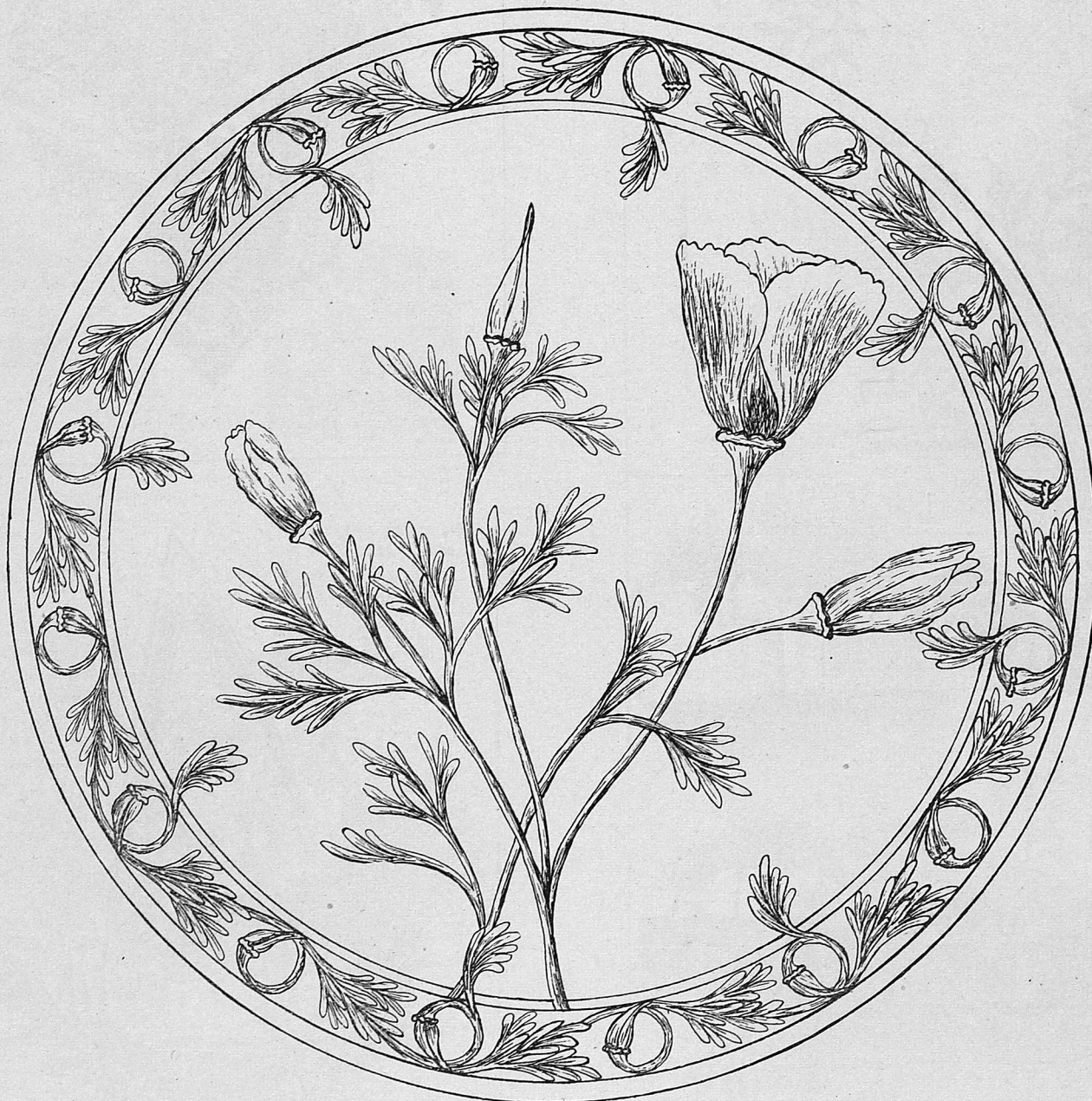
WELL known writer says, "Art moves in cycles of styles. At one time a separate style in blended form is resurrected; at other times we witness blended styles. New combinations of old styles may create a novelty, with nothing new in principle, new only in arrangement and with no great variety in details. We have few decorative forms that do not retain some element of a preceding period." To this we can not dissent.

Those of us who have given any attention to the origin and composition of styles in decorative art will readily agree that in the present era, there is little or no purity; although we may be compelled to call such by, or adopt some classical name for our purpose, the intent is not to deceive; but the designer merely wishes to convey the idea that the scheme was not to faithfully

XV, XVI, and the Empire. The revival of these styles has chiefly been confined to interiors, while the "Cinque Cento," "Italian Renaissance," "Romanesques" "early English" and "Elizabethian" in composite from the "Celtic" and "Byzantine," as well as the "Adams" are extensively employed both for interiors and exteriors. Modern inventiveness joins hands with ancient picturesqueness and produces varying and unique results. This we see constantly exemplified in the interior as well as on the exterior of our buildings. Our own, and only style, the "Colonial," has found amazing favor with our people, and no wonder; what prettier, more uniform, or chaste style have we? If simplicity is beauty, our "Colonial" style will be a joy forever. Although light and not sufficiently ornate for all purposes, we will surely find and develop some other one for our more substantial work, and the present indications point strongly to the adoption of the "Romanesque."

A gratifying change is being made by our architects. Formerly, when the dwelling was constructed by the builders, they considered their work done, and their interest ceased upon its completion.

To-day a large number have added decorative departments



CALIFORNIA POPPY (ESCHSCHOLTZIA) PLAQUE DESIGN, BY E. A. HALSTED.

decorate in exact reproduction of some period or era of time, but simply to avail himself of the advantages of that particular style, with such adaptations, in form and color, discarding here, appending there, modifying this, strengthening that; and reserving the right to make such changes as will best accord with the surroundings, improvements, temperament and culture of to-day.

We endeavor to be as classical as our knowledge and resources of material will permit. We all know to consistently decorate in say the "Louis XV" or "Japanese" style if we at all succeed in obtaining the genuine article, we do so at a great outlay; and then we may venture the opinion that our stained glass, mantle and fire-place will be very modern, and the exterior architecture will be composite "Romanesque."

Although we are utilizing all styles in our present decorations, the predominating ones have been adapted from the French period of the "Rococo" the different kings, Louis XIV,

\* From a paper read before the N. Y. Master Painters and Decorators.

to their offices and designs for the interior decorations. And who better qualified than they to enter the field with us? Equipped with their knowledge of leading styles, and of home building, their drawing and designing abilities, who better prepared to take hold of this, their new field, the supervision of the interior decoration? Their ideas and hints cannot fail to be valuable to us.

The painter will naturally be brought into closer relationship with the owners, for the architect will not hold further communication with the contractor or cabinet maker, when engaged on his scheme of decoration, for they are valueless to him then, but will confer directly with and impart his views to the decorator; the man whose technical knowledge and experience so perfectly fit him to be the architect's able coadjutor, to aid him to harmoniously color and execute in detail his sketches, thus avoiding the misunderstanding when imparted through an intermediate, and the saving of at least one profit to his clients.



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This result can but be beneficial to our craft. Emancipated from the contractors, we will be distinct and receive that independent recognition for which we are so bravely striving.

The coloring used in decorating modern dwellings is always, consciously or unconsciously, controlled and dictated by the prevailing fashion. To gratify its whims, new shades and tints must constantly be created. These colors will appear in the latest textile fabric, and necessarily are introduced in the surroundings. The painter must become acquainted with these and introduce them in his scheme of coloring. In the selection and arrangement of his colors, his degree of taste, refinement and art will be seen. He may possess all necessary scientific and technical knowledge of his calling, his treatment with the brush be skillful, his judgment of design and proportion of same be perfect, but the entire effect may be destroyed, or, at least, marred, if the coloring does not receive the proper attention.

The successfully decorated room receives its maximum amount of work, not in labor or material, but in thought and study. A certain shade in one place will appear entirely different when exposed and contrasted to different lights and surroundings. "Seeing is believing;" this trite saying aptly applies to a decorator studying a color effect.

It is true we have certainly improved our taste for colors. The abandonment of those gaudy and incongruous colors, seldom resulting in harmony, to the fewer, chaste and subtle tones of colors used to-day is convincing proof of this. In choosing our colors, attention should be given to the character of the apartment; whether gay or grave; dignified or mirthful. Its occupants or frequenters, whether old or young; masculine or feminine; we study carefully and choose such a plan as would best adapt itself to our purpose, so we select one color for our scheme and use that in its varying shades, or introduce into our scheme its proper complimentary tones, studying to create a perfect harmony and to obtain the most beautiful results in the simplest manner.

To endeavor to name the prevailing tones of color would be too exhaustive, and would convey but a faint idea of their manifold number. Our intimacy with the names used in dress goods will be of assistance here. It is impossible to have a name for all our colors. The best tones for decorating are those half tones that border on or hover between several colors without being either; those indefinite subdued tones, whose beauties must be felt to be properly appreciated as they cannot be described, viz., "russets," "sage green," "cadet blue," etc. Take "terra cotta," for instance, what name more indefinite and vague, you can draw any conclusion from the color from a soda biscuit to a Pompeian red and you will not be in error; so with olive and other tones. As a rule artists do not spend much time in learning the name of a color, but in producing and developing the same, which is most important to their purpose.

Gold and bronze will constantly be used in decorations: The latter not extensively as formerly. Its very cheapness, the profusion in which it was used, its perishable nature, all have caused a great reaction to set in. This ought to be a welcome change, as the demand for pure gold leaf will insure a higher grade of work throughout. Gold or bronze should never be used *en masse*, or in profusion, but should be used sparingly and with judgment, or it will suggest ostentation. It ought never to be used on backgrounds, unless in very small patterns or mottled effects, or when closely covered with ornament, but rather introduced to heighten an already rich piece of coloring. Drawings should be of a minute and graceful character, lines should be finely drawn and only the high parts of relief work be illuminated with gold. To treat otherwise would be barbarous and vulgar. As gold naturally suggests riches and as the height of culture and refinement inclines to modesty and reservedness, it would certainly be inconsistent to obtrusively display too much gold.

In the past few years a new method of treating our decorations has sprung up, and consists of the manner of preparing our backgrounds with gold size and covering with metal or composition leaf, either gold, silver, or copper, and then applying with transparent colors, a glazing or lacquering of any desired hue over the same. This softens and robs the material of its tinsel appearance. These backgrounds are used, as well for artistic, as fruit, game, etc., as for conventional ornamentation. Some very curious and beautiful results have been produced in this way, but great care must be exercised or the decorator will find that the results of his attempt will have a cheap varnishy effect.

The covering of walls with silk, tapestry and cretonne is on the increase for finer wall hangings. As a rule the effects are very beautiful, and the good coloring and softer nature of the material, easily accord them with their surroundings, but its perishability, the ravishes of moth and dust, the fading of the aniline dyes, will prevent the adoption of this material for permanent decoration.

The demand for canvas or muslin covered backgrounds is steadily growing for our more permanent mural decoration. This is certainly a step in the right direction, and is cheapest in

the end. Hasten the day when it becomes more in vogue, for one of the severest difficulties the decorator must contend with and assume responsibility for, is the poorly finished plastering of a modern house. After overcoming this difficulty and successfully decorating the room, he is apt to see his best efforts mocked at by the blistering and cracking of the plastering.

Relief decoration has been tested and found successful, and the decorator will find steady employment for it, whether in a classical, unique or modern style, modeled by form or hand, or stamped by machine. The inventions of material and method of applying, this plastic and solid relief, have been numberless, from pressed papers to the heavy stucco work, all come under the heading of relief or raised work. The advantage of relief is the large variety of treatment of which it admits, and where the decorator has his opportunity to display his talent to obtain the most beautiful results. In this latter respect there has been a gradual improvement, the demand for the so-called roughing or combing has grown steadily less. It has seen its day, but the higher grade of artistic free hand relief work, which requires the services of a modeler is in increased demand.

A new material for relief ceilings has made its appearance, and is composed of either sheet iron or steel, corrugated or pressed in ornamental forms and then put up in panels, after which it is painted and decorated, and it is difficult to distinguish it from plaster relief. The use of these ceilings have been confined to stores, however. We have also seen these ceilings put up already decorated in a burnt and glazed imitation of lacquered material, but a very cheap and tinsel effect is the result.

Paper hangings continue to be extensively used if not quite as much as formerly, still sufficiently to keep our coadjutor, the manufacturer, on the qui vive in inventing new designs, colors, materials, etc., for the laws of health must be consulted by the decorator, and we are giving the hygienic and sanitary condition of our dwellings close attention; for these reasons washable and sanitary papers find most favor, while metallics, velours, etc., are left on the shelves.

There seems to be a disposition to return to painted walls for our sleeping apartments, not in the old-fashioned treatment, but in blended damask effects, and a variety of other pretty ways; the decorator has sufficient scope here, and may be as broad in his treatment as he chooses. By the way, a large number of decorators are only putting friezes on parlor and music room walls, and then they must be an exact match in design and color with wall hangings. The difficulty of exact width, design and color, unless when painted for the upper rooms, has led to their abandonment.

Our employees, who are in reality our assistants; are also giving constant evidence of their improvement in taste and judgment. A few years ago, when the paints were mixed in the shop, a workman rarely had opportunity to develop his taste for colors, for taste can be developed and cultivated; but to-day, when all parts of a room must be in sympathy and in harmony, with the general tone of coloring, his thinking faculties, as well as his dexterity as a brushman, are brought into use with most beneficial results which promise brightly for our calling. Our workmen feel the impulse of our efforts to elevate the standard of our craft, and nobly respond when called upon for assistance. Our artists are studying for a high ideal. Never before in the history of decorative art in this country were there better skies, flowers, figures or allegorical paintings executed, coloring more harmonious, drawings more perfect, and technical treatment more varied and finished. Doubtless the change intended for permanent decoration painting the canvas in oil in the studio, where undisturbed they can ply their art, has been the cause of inciting and spurring them on to their highest idealizations, as well as the recognition and appreciation accorded by a liberal public. There is plenty of work for them to do, landscapes and marine views, figure groups, all that please the eye on canvas can appropriately be used in decorating.

Art is said to be that which appeals to our emotions and impulses, whether it be music, sculpture, acting or painting, and stimulates or depresses them through the different senses. If so, then our calling is indeed an art. An harmoniously tinted room—without being poetic, and speaking of symphonies and dreams in color—does that not instantly welcome and comfort and make us feel at ease? How often have you entered a room, and immediately there was a drop of twenty degrees in the temperature, you receive such a chill? Some coloring is so offensive, it instantly arouses a feeling of indignation or combativeness in you. You feel as if your calling were trifled with; and again, you step into an adjoining room, and your outraged senses will be instantly soothed and quieted, so suggestively reposeful has the work been done. Some natures are so blunted that they are not effected in this manner. The more impulsive the spirit, sensitive the nature and higher the culture, the more readily affected we will be.

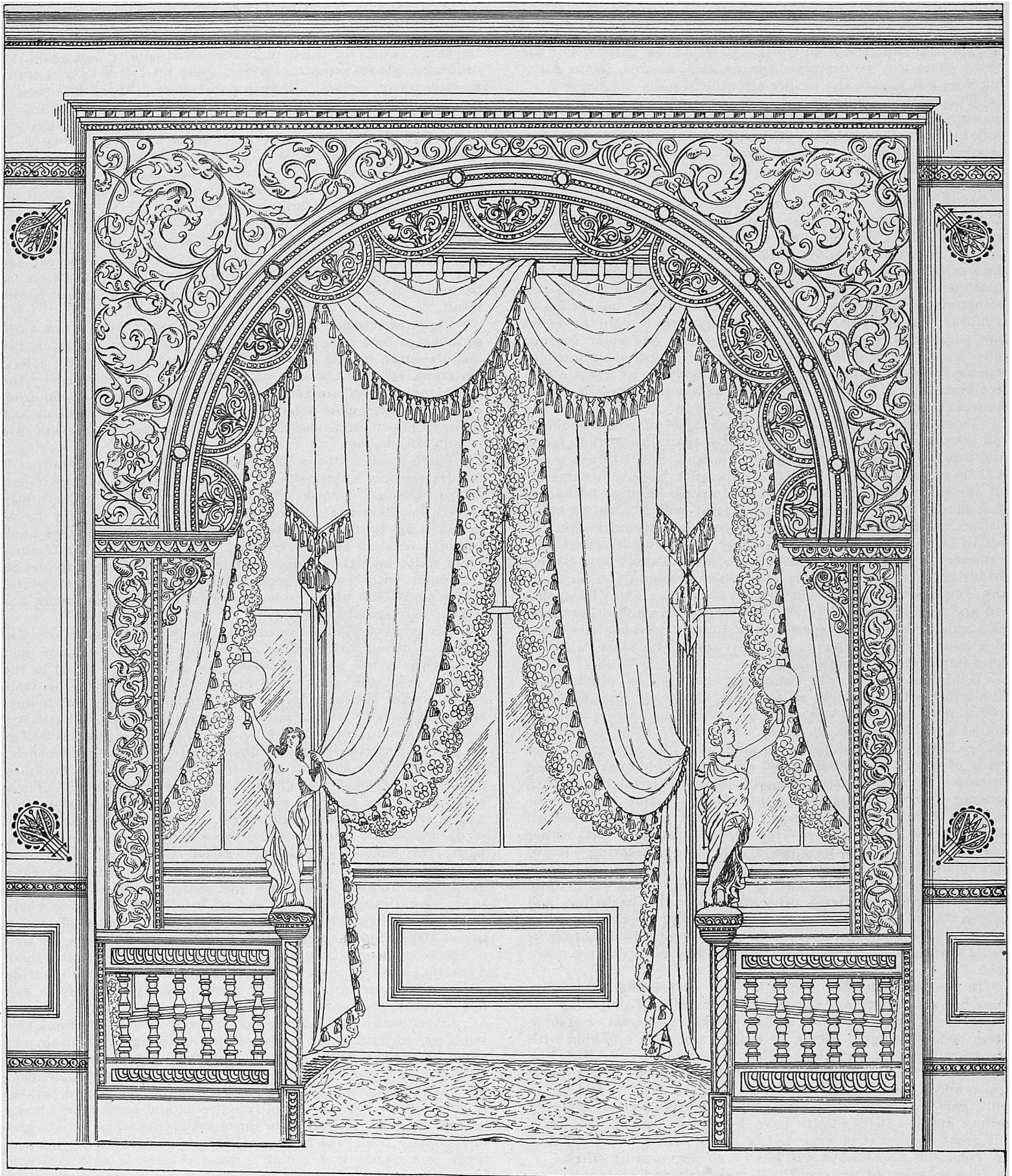
Truly there is a soul in our art, or at least a finer feeling, not gifted to all, which must be disciplined and cultivated, for

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to be able to discern those subtler tones, to appreciate those minute differences in tints and shades, to feel the effect of warm and cool, or to distinguish between chaste and vulgar colors, there is something more than the technique of a craft required to be thus effected.

The more we are surrounded by beautiful forms and harmonious colors, the more exacting become our natures, the greater our requirements, the higher our ideal. It is our education, our intelligence, our culture, that creates this natural demand for a

old, but he knows more about wood turning than he did. When quite young Mr. Solomon was apprenticed to a cabinet maker. He soon became proficient in the plain branches of his trade and began work at a wood lathe. So dexterous did he become in the use of his wheel and chisel that he made a fortune when 34 years of age. Then he stopped working for profit, but continued to work at his lathe for pleasure. He delights to work in wood and ivory, and some of his productions are marvelous, consisting of figures of people, animals and puzzles. He makes



SUGGESTION FOR BAY WINDOW DRAPERY, BY C. W. CLARKE, NEW YORK.

higher art. We know there is no finality in art, but we must endeavor, on all occasions, in return for our labors, to obtain the greatest amount of permanent beauty, and to strive, constantly strive, to reach the highest excellence, the position occupied by our old masters of the 15th and 16th centuries.

At East Buffalo, N. Y., lives George Solomon, a marvelous turning lathe artist. It is said he is not related to Solomon of

angular as well as round figures. He once worked six months to turn out a perfect five cornered star inside a perforated ball. The star was made from the material inside the ball, and though loose there it does not turn around, as each other corner projects through a perforation in the ball. One of Mr. Solomon's most simple feats is to put a piece of wood or ivory in a lathe and turn out four pigs at the same time, with single chisel, each pig having a perfect curl in his tail.